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ABSTRACT

Two historic pieces of legislation have galvanized deaf people in ways that have not concerned the hearing community. The first is the American Disabilities Act, which extended legal protection to deaf people. The other, less well-known, is the "Deaf Prez Now" (DPN) or the Gallaudet University protest, which occurred in 1988 when the university's board of trustees hired as the university president the only finalist for the position who was not deaf. Students locked classrooms and staged marches. Their protest received national attention and eventually most of their demands were met: a deaf president was chosen; the normal-hearing chair of the board of trustee was replaced by a deaf person; and deaf persons became a majority on the board. The DPN is important because it shows what can happen when the deaf community takes its education into its own hands. Deaf education reform, including exploration of alternative means of classroom organization such as the "open classroom," needs to come from the deaf themselves if that reform is to be successful. Deaf students are realizing that they do not have to sit back and be passive students. Scholars in speech communication should not turn a deaf ear on the 1988 Gallaudet student uprising. Scholarship about the Gallaudet student protest has been limited, even isolated, to the deaf community. It has not been discussed in the mainstream journals of the hearing community. (TB)

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"You're not there yet"
The Coming of Deaf Education Reform through the DPN Social Movement

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The Coming of Deaf Education Reform
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Abstract

The 1988 Gallaudet University Protest is remembered as the revolutionary Deaf Prez Now (DPN) movement. This paper attempts to depict the 1988 DPN movement which gained world-wide attention and support as a catalyst for Deaf people to take control of their own destiny, namely deaf education. The author sees DPN as an historical social movment having great implications on deaf education, which has been notoriously known to be in dismal condition. In 1988, deaf students stood up and voiced that they were no longer going to be a silent minority; instead, they showed hearing and deaf people alike that they were capable of functioning in a hearing world and that everyone should listen to deaf people. The significance of the DPN movement was that no longer were hearing people going to be the oppressors telling the deaf community that "they weren't there yet" when it comes to their education Because of DPN, the deaf students in higher education began to fight back saying, "We are there. The time is now."

Key Concepts: Gallaudet University Protest, Deaf Prez Now, social movements, deafness, deaf education

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Introduction

Two historic pieces of legislation have galvanized deaf people in ways that have not concerned the hearing community. With court-mandated mainstreaming enacted through the 1975 Public Law 94- 142 and the newly enacted 1990 American Disabilities Act (ADA), there has been renewed appearance of interest in the deaf education These acts of legislation affected deaf people because the Public Law 94-142, in part, sought to remove hearing-impaired children from state residential schools for the deaf and place them in "normal" classrooms across America. This legislated action, according to some deaf people, would lead to the erosion and destruction of Deaf culture and its language, American Sign Language (ASL). Deaf leaders argued that it is in the state residential programs that deaf students learn educational matters the easiest as well as taking in knowledge about deaf culture and learn to use their natural language (ASL), especially since most deaf children are born to hearing parents. While the PL 94-142 has not been praised by many in the deaf community, few oppose the ADA politically. With societal attitudes and erroneous stereotypes circulating about deaf people in general, ADA gives some legal protection to deaf people in the classroom from elementary to college. For the deaf community, this self-interest was particularly hightened in 1988 when a group of deaf students closed down the only liberal arts university in the world for the deaf. The Washington, D.C. event is referred by two different labels, depending on one's own hearing status. Most hearing individuals refer to the events of March 6-13, 1988 as the "Gallaudet University Protest." Deaf individuals remember the events as the "Deaf Prez Now (DPN) movement." This paper attempts to illustrate why scholars interested in movements relating to education should be aware of the Gallaudet University protest.

The historic Gallaudet University revolution will be discussed from both the voice of an often-forgotten deaf community as well as the hearing community. Therefore, both the terms "DPN Movement" and "Gallaudet Student Protest" will be used interchangeably.

The 1988 student movement at Gallaudet University parallels with the multitudes of protests held at colleges and universities around the world in the 1960s and 1970s. Bluntly, deaf people were tired of being constantly picked over in terms of better jobs or administrative positions in deaf education. Almost always, hearing people were chosen instead of deaf candidates to become school teachers, administrators, superintendents, deans, and even presidents. Deaf students and educators alike grew weary of this ingrained pattern and wanted to bring about changes. Before proceeding further about the Gallaudet Student protest, careful examination of the role of social movements and their aftermaths in educational settings will be discussed so that links can be shown lending insight into what could become successful teaching and administrative practices in deaf education.

Revolutions, Uprisings, Movements, and Protests

Student uprisings, movements, and protests were rampant in the 1960's (Brickman & Lehrer, 1970; Califano, 1970; Cockburn & Blackburn, 1969; Mallery, 1960; Postman & Wengartner, 1971; Statera, 1975). Many demonstrations were documented in the spirit of condemning students for questioning authority on issues like racially integrating schools or divesting funds from South Africa. Other demonstrations used the college campus as a stage to protest government policies like U.S. involvement in the Vietnam war. It had become clear that America was no longer producing passive students. Later, a perspective borne out of the protests encouraged students to become more active in their own educational process and to become involved in their world. It had seemed that learning took on more significance when the students had become riled up and were

motivated in issues that interested them. In the case of the Deaf President Now (DPN) movement, numerous deaf people, Gallaudet faculty members, and scholars of deafness studies hinted the revolt had been coming.

Deaf President Now Movement

The movement was coming.... Hearing educators were saying, "No, you haven't come. You are not there yet."

But, deep down, deaf students, teachers, and administrators felt as if they had come.

All was moving along according to the Board of Trustees' plan for selecting a new president of Gallaudet University. The Board of Trustees had narrowed the search down to three finalists: Dr. I. King Jordan, a popular deaf dean among the students at Gallaudet University, Dr. Harvey J. Corson, a deaf superintendent from the Louisiana School for the Deaf, and Dr. Elisabeth Ann Zinser, a hearing Vice-Chancellor at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. After a 10-4 vote was tallied, Zinser was selected president, effective July, 1988. The students and Gallaudet faculty were disappointed that neither of the two deaf finalists was selected, especially when they expressed a request for the next president to be deaf. Shortly thereafter, the students padlocked classroom buildings, blocked entrances onto the campus, and shut down the university. (See Gannon, 1989 for a detailed reading). Why the anger and disappointment? What were the issues? There were several deeply embedded issues but a central one that continued to surface was the adage: "Deaf people are not there yet." This issue was debated on national television during the crux of the protest. On Nightline with deaf Gallaudet University student Greg Hlibok who helped organize the protest, acclaimed

deaf actress Marlee Matlin, and newsanchor Ted Koeppel, a controversial Dr. Zinser argued that deaf people were "not there yet" (March 9, 1988).

Dr. Zinser: ...I believe very strongly that a deaf individual one day will not only be the president of Gallaudet University---

Ms. Matlin: Why not now? Why not now? ....

Mr. Hlibok: No, that's old news. I'm tired of that statement, one day, again and again, someday a deaf person. We've got to break this cycle. ...

[later in the interview]

Mr. Hlibok: This statement, one day a deaf president, is very old rhetoric. We've been hearing this for 124 years. We're getting tired of hearing this statement. This is just a cycle. Every time a new president comes in they say, well, one day. So this shows that the past presidents have failed, then, if they haven't provided any deaf leaders, any opportunities, then obviously Gallaudet hasn't done a good job. If they have done a good job, then there should be a deaf president, someone qualified to do this.

Hlibok was correct; it was old rhetoric. The rhetorical power of deaf people "not being there yet" is embedded in this conversation as well as in other exchanges. During the protest, the chair of the Board of Trustees, Jane Spilman was quoted as saying, "Deaf people are not ready to function in a hearing world." Despite working at Gallaudet University for several years, Spilman never learned to sign and could not communicate with the deaf students without use of interpreters. The students at Gallaudet University became defiant in their roles. They clearly held the university in their hands. The three national news networks were giving the students nightly airtime and the students were getting monies and letters of support from then-President Ronald Reagan, several high-profile congressional members, as well as international support from deaf communities in other nations. The world was watching Gallaudet to see if changes in deaf education were going to come.

With classes not in session, the university padlocked tight, and successful student marches down to the Capitol, the deaf students laid out their demands. There were four

demands: first, that the Board of Trustees appoint one of the two deaf finalists as President of Gallaudet University; second, that normal-hearing Jane Spilman, chair of the Board, be replaced with a deaf person; third, the Board change the by-laws to require that the majority of the members be deaf; and fourth, there be no reprisals for any of the students, staff, or faculty who participated in or supported the protest.

Days later, Zinser resigned. Zinser claimed she stepped down from the presidency to further the civil rights of deaf people and to prevent violence from breaking out on the campus. She stressed continuously that the students did not force her out of office (R. A. McIntosh, personal communication, April 11, 1988). After leaving Washington, D.C. and returning to her previous position at the University of North Carolina, Zinser wrote in a guest editorial, "The attribute (and culture) of deafness or hearing should be neither a prerequisite nor a disqualification for the presidency of a university, whether it predominantly serves deaf or hearing people" (1988). She added, "As the civil rights of deaf people are assimilated fully in our society, it will be as conceivable to have a hearing president of Gallaudet, once again, as it will be to have a deaf president of the University of North Carolina. **We** are not there yet. Not now" [bold type added] (Zinser, 1988).

I. King Jordan, one of the two deaf finalists, was selected as the new president. The students hailed the deaf presidential selection by wearing buttons and T-shirts supporting Jordan's inauguration. Jane Spilman resigned as Chair of the Board. The Board's membership became more than 51 percent deaf. And, there were no reprisals taken for any student, staff, or faculty who participated or supported the protest. All of the students' four demands were met.

The DPN protest succeeded as a social movement furthering deaf education because deaf people wanted to take control of their educational destiny and they decided to no longer wait for their oppressors to relent and hand over control to the deaf people. Whether intentional or not, hearing people have structured deaf education and so, in that

way, hearing people were able to maintain control of deaf people. Hearing people's rhetorical argument for being in positions of power over deaf people have been, "You are not there yet." Deaf people's rhetorical response has been, "We are not there because you won't let us." The significance of the DPN movement was that, for the first time, deaf people seized an opportunity to take tangible control of their own education because they knew "they weren't there yet." And more importantly that they were not going to get there until they decided to move together as a collective, organized group.

University Influence Permeates to the Classroom

The university protest came to an end and the aftermath of "trickle down effects" of the DPN movement began. New leaders, supporters, and attitudes that had surfaced and solidified during the movement gained momentum and became instrumental in carrying out the results of the movement. One of the results was the beginning of changes in deaf education. As many ideas are conceived in universities, it was now time for the reforms to permeate the local levels-- to the residential schools for the deaf around the nation. The revolutions of the sixties and seventies took place at a time when some educators at a higher level decided that traditional pedagogy was not working in local classrooms. Students wanted to have more input in their education and to have a voice in policy-making. Some twenty years later, deaf students stood up and voice the same concern; they wanted to have a voice in policy-making as it affected their education. The hearing students were fed up with the passive learning pedagogy that has a professor lecturing while the students listen. One response to this criticism of failed traditional pedagogy was a new philosophy that penetrated American classrooms. This philosophy became known as open classrooms.

Open Classrooms

The theory of open classrooms has been a controversial teaching method. Students need experience in order to structure the world (Piaget, 1976). In other words, they need "to learn how to how learn." Open classrooms took root in England after World War II as part of school reform. It later spread to the United States in the 1960's as American educators attempted to respond to pleas for curriculum reform that would make learning more effective and pleasurable to the student. Advocates for open classrooms stressed it would foster self-discipline (Keating, Pickerng, Slack, & White, 1990; Silberman, Allender & Yanoff, 1972) and become a closer match between the students and learning (Spodek & Walberg, 1975). The continued effects of the non-traditional education movement can be seen in classroom arrangements and "hands-on" science curricula. Proponents of the open classroom philosophy claimed flexibility was an integral element for success. That is, students had options within a parameter and the students had input in decisions made in their behalf. The open classroom also allowed for varying learning processes to work in different students. Educators argued that some children needed structure (less flexibility) while others required less structure (more flexibility).

One school, Summerhill, took the open classroom philosophy further. Founded in 1921 prior to the educational protests of the sixties, Summerhill began as an experimental school by A.S. Neill in England. Neill concluded that traditional pedagogy forced students to fit in with the school. His approach was "to make the school fit the child" (1960, p. 4). The traditional instructional methods were wrong, he thought, because they were based on an adult's conception of what a child should be and how a child should learn. Neill's principle of self-determination was to replace authority with freedom and to teach a child without the use of force by appealing to the child's curiosity and needs, thereby getting the child interested in the world around him/her. At Summerhill and other "open classroom" schools, the students themselves directed much

of their education. The open classroom philosophy, in part, revolted against the established educational philosophy of teacher-directed teaching in the 1960's.

What does the Gallaudet University Student Protest have to do with instructional practices in the classroom? Spurred on by the 1988 DPN protest, deaf individuals and some supporters have just begun their own revolt against the traditional established structure of administration and pedagogy. Just as Neill argued that trying to make the student fit the school was a mistake, the DPN movement believed that trying to model deaf education after hearing education would be in error as well.

Traditional Deaf Education Practices are Failing

Johnson, Liddell, and Erting (1989) argued that the deaf education curriculum as it now stands has failed its students because "access to curricular content at grade level" is not provided and "acceptance of the notion that below grade-level performance is to be expected of deaf children" is allowed (p. 3). "Most arguments about pedagogy have centered on what means of communication should be implemented or inspired in deaf children in order for them to match more closely the normative linguistic and behavioral expectations of hearing children" (Johnson, Liddell & Erting, 1989, p. 3). Courses in deaf education have emphasized differences between English, a spoken language, and ASL, a visual language. The difficulty of language may stem from the fact that most teachers in the classrooms of the deaf are hearing. "...It is unusual to find deaf teachers in public school programs for deaf children" (Johnson, Liddell & Erting, 1989, p. 9). Hearing people enrolled in teacher education training programs for the deaf spend much of their classroom time learning about the different issues of languages between English and American Sign Language (ASL). With more time being spent on the language issues, less time is devoted to teaching practical issues like how to teach mathematics and science. The language issues are not problematic for **most** deaf teachers since they are

already fluent in ASL. When more deaf people are teaching in deaf education programs, they do not need to focus on language-oriented issues. Instead, they can teach mathematics and science and prepare their deaf students for all the positions that now elude deaf people. In short, deaf people will be educated equally in terms of hearing students because they would be getting at-grade curriculm instruction. If deaf teachers taught the deaf students in primary grades, then as the deaf students advanced to upper grades, perhaps standardized evaluation will determine that the deaf students are not so woefully behind their hearing counterparts as research studies are now showing. Deaf students constantly must battle the "lower expectations" that hearing teachers have of them. If the gap between deaf and hearing students in scholastic achievement narrows, perhaps the teachers' expectations of student performance will change.

The DPN movement was orchestrated and carried out by the deaf students themselves. There were no "lower standards" imposed by hearing individuals. With a deaf university president in power, then the deaf students and administrators could focus their energies on education; whereas on the other hand, if a hearing person continued the presidency at Gallaudet University, the oppressed would be battling the oppressor because the deaf students did not want to be led by a hearing person. Currently, most personnel in deaf schools who control resources and policies are hearing persons (Corbett & Jensema, 1981; Moores, 1978 cited in Erting, 1987). If the trickle-down effects of the 1988 Gallaudet University revolution brought about more deaf teachers in the deaf classrooms, the implications could be that "lower standards" would be eradiated. Deafness needs to be presented to deaf students as a physical characteristic that will not limit them academically or socially. From a hearing perspective, deafness is seen as a non-normal condition, a deficiency (Erting, 1987). Their concepts of the world are influenced greatly by their auditory input. Deaf people, on the other hand, have a different definition of deafness. Their definition does not include any dysfunction

(Erting, 1987). Therefore the argument could be made that deaf students taught by deaf teachers would excel in education due to the positive role modelling and the ease of communication.

The grave situation of deaf education curriculum being so lacking in quality has caused parents to remove their children from programs specially designed for students with hearing loss. John, Liddell, and Erting cited Stone-Harris (1988) who has observed that deaf parents sought mainstream (hearing) placements for their own deaf children in order to provide access to at-grade-level curriculum. This is unusual because most deaf parents place their deaf children in deaf schools. Deaf parents are able to do consider a mainstream placement for their deaf children because they can provide deaf role-modelling and instruction of Deaf culture and ASL at home. Hearing parents of deaf children, on the other hand, do not have this option since they are hearing and do not possess knowledge or personal experience of deafness, Deaf culture, or ASL. Clearly, deaf parents are sending the message, nonetheless, that subject matter is more important than speech and language issues.

Educational Reform For the Deaf By the Deaf

Deaf education reform needs to come from the deaf if reform is to be successful. The reform started in 1988 with the DPN movement as the triggering event. Trickle down effects normally take about 20 years before a noticeable change in societal attitudes occur (Mallery, 1966). The deaf are now more than seven years into their reform. There has been recent adoption of process-orientation (Bruner, 1966) as a teaching strategy in classrooms. Some supporters advocate the use of Jerome Bruner's pedagogy with deaf education. Educational scholars need to revisit Bruner's theory relative to deaf education with skepticism. Bruner's idea of process-orientation is a hearing pedagogy since Bruner himself is hearing. While his theory seems sound, one cannot assume this good

pedagogy works with deaf. Some may argue that good pedagogy is good pedagogy, and that whether the pedagogy is the brainchild of a hearing or deaf individual is irrelevant. This, too, is a theory and has not been proven. Just as Neill questioned the adult's conception of how a child should learn, one needs to examine Bruner's conception of how individuals with all senses working normally would learn to an individual who does not share the identical senses working the same way. A PBS program entitled, "The Mind" illustrated that different brain areas are stimulated when spoken to or signed to (1988). This lends scientific evidence that perhaps some processing differs between deaf individuals and hearing individuals. If processing is found to be different between deaf and non-deaf individuals, perhaps our theories of learning must reflect these differences. "Reform is reform," one could argue and it does not matter if it is a deaf or hearing person who instigates it. While it may seem plausible that anyone could bring about reform, one needs only to look at history and see what has worked. Credibility for new ideas tend to be best received by those who are directly involved. Good teaching pedagogy that is sound in theory and works well with one speech community (i.e., hearing) is not a sure-thing for another speech community (i.e., deaf).

Conclusion

In sum, the DPN movement has had a significant beginning impact on education for deaf people. More deaf individuals have been appointed to head up schools for the deaf. Little by little, boards at residential deaf schools across the nation are having the majority of the members be deaf. While the Gallaudet student protest may not be able to take direct credit for these new developments, one needs little convincing that DPN supporters were indirectly responsible. In time, the aftermath effects of the DPN movement will trickle down into the deaf classrooms. The twenty year latency period that it took for the student revolts of the sixties to trickle down may be less for deaf education reform. It

could take less latent time since the deaf community is smaller in population (500,000 - 1 million people) and they are described as a tightly-knit speech community.

Deaf students are realizing that they do not have to sit back and be passive students. I. King Jordan said that when he travels to deaf schools across the nation, he notices that the deaf students' "self concept and expectations of themselves have changed dramatically" (DeLoughry, 1989). Studies have shown that the development of social identity and enhancement of self-esteem for deaf children is important for learning to occur and that the best models to foster this development are other deaf adults (Johnson, Liddell & Erting, 1989, p. 16). Bolstered identity and self-esteem can be indicators of success. For example, Neill (1960) spoke of success with his students when he saw their confidence improved. During the interview on the Gallaudet Student Protest, Marlee Matlin stressed the importance of role models for deaf people (Nightline, March 9, 1988). In other words, the role models are the leaders and teachers. With leaders and teachers from their own community, the deaf community can figure out how to best change the teaching strategies in their own classrooms.

Greater social awareness and political consciousness initiated by the DPN movement has led to innovative programs that examine issues facing the university and the deaf (DeLoughry, 1989). Jordan contended that, "there's more of a sense of ownership in the programs that are developing and that have been developing, and the people who feel that sense of ownership work harder..." (DeLoughry, 1989). Deaf people should be the owners of innovative programs for deaf education. Deaf education must be developed by deaf individuals. The purpose of DPN movement was to empower deaf individuals to put themselves in positions of having a say in their own educational destinies and that includes changing deaf pedagogy from what it is today in deaf education. Scholars in speech communication should not turn a deaf ear on the 1988 Gallaudet student uprising. Scholarship about the Gallaudet Student protest has been

limited, even isolated, to the deaf community. It has not been discussed in the mainstream journals of the hearing community. This paper's intent has been to bring the event to the attention of a wider audience and to show how this social movement has affected deaf education. Everyone knew about the protests of the sixties and most people recognize those events as being of utmost importance. The Gallaudet University Student Protest was a genuine social movement just as important-- everyone in the deaf community heard about it... and now people in the hearing community need to hear it as well.

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